

# **THE DARK SIDE OF CHRISTIANITY**

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# DARK SIDE OF CHRISTIANITY.

SHOWING IT UNREASONABLE AND IMPRACTICABLE.

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As I believe it is not legal to say that Christianity is not true, I only contend that it is unreasonable and impracticable. Think of the millions of people known to live on this globe, and then listen to the talk of the Christian, you would imagine that all the world followed his prophet and professed his faith. The fact is, only a few of the millions even profess to be Christian; and these are so divided, that we may say with truth the Christian party in this world is split up into sects. The sects are so numerous that a man may many times change his Church, and yet continue to be what is called a Christian. When dissatisfied with the Church he may take refuge in the Chapel, and chapels exist in almost endless variety; and if all these fail him, he may set up on his own account and be a Free Christian! If there is only one Christianity—only one true way to heaven—the multiplication of sects must be a great source of confusion to the would-be believer. The Christian passes from one sect to another in search of the *true* Church; his life is a series of changes, being everything by turns, and nothing long. Some unsettled spirits spend their whole lives in search of the true Church. Sometimes this ends in unbelief—that is, unbelief in churches and chapels, and the reasons given for this form of doubt are often too contemptible to appear in print. These people “take their stand on the Bible,” and even they have different ways of looking at the Bible. Some read it as literal, others as figurative or poetic, or philosophic, or symbolic, or prophetic, or spiritual—or the Lord knows what! Christian parties differ so much, that the only thing they are heartily agreed on is, that the unbeliever ought to be put down! Yet each sect contends that it alone is right, and every other wrong. This is the only justification that each sect can urge for its separate existence. I take the decision of all, which

is, that they are each of them wrong. This extraordinary conclusion is easily explained, by the fact that all the leading points in each are but dreams, matters of conjecture and fancy.

This great variety is proof to me that nothing is known, nothing is certain, nothing is demonstrable in any of the faiths—it is all imagination, myth, fiction.

Towards the Christians I bear no ill-will, and forgive all their persecution of me. Times and manners have happily changed during the past twenty-five years, and in spite of Christianity the life of an unbeliever is not so rough as it was—there is less ignorance, and consequently less hatred. Only once during my life has the peace of Birmingham been disturbed by contending sects, and that once sufficiently showed the state of society which would result if Christians were allowed to exhibit their feelings, and express their opinions of one another, uncontrolled by the unbelievers, the indifferent, and the magistrates. It required a secular army to prevent the saints destroying each other. The frenzy, the excitement, the ungovernable fury of a believer would, if unchecked, turn the world into a bedlam, and instead of being harmony and peace, society would be one uninterrupted scene of bloodshed and robbery. Sensible men have a wholesome horror of theological strife. All my little efforts have had one object—the subjugation of bigotry and intolerance, and the increase of liberty and justice. Freedom for all mankind, consistent with the rights of each other, that is my doctrine, and when once fully established, people will be amazed at their ignorance and folly; they will wonder what power bewitched them, what diabolical influence prevented the adoption of so beneficent a doctrine.

If Christianity had started with this doctrine of universal freedom, and preached and practised it, what a different world we might have seen!

Unhappily, the declarations of Christianity on this subject are most unreasonable, and the results, as declared in the history of the Christian world, have been most deplorable. "He that believeth not, shall be damned." (Mark xvi.). This assumes that a man can believe or not by his own effort, as though evidence—facts—had nothing to do with either belief or unbelief. Custom and interest can make liars and hypocrites, but evidences control belief.

The truest sentence ever uttered cannot influence any man unless he understands the language in which it is expressed.

That two and two make four every one admits who understands what is meant, but none other. Men do not believe unless they understand. But "believe or be damned" is not only inconsistent with the laws of thought—it ignores the other declarations of the same book. For instance—"It is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." (Phil. ii.). Again—"By grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." (Eph. ii.).

St. Paul (2 Cor. iii.) goes so far as to state that we are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves. The Master settles this point (John vi.)—"No man can come to me except the Father draw him."

Yet St. Paul confirms the opposite doctrine taught by the same Master, when he writes (2 Cor. vi.)—"Be ye not unequally yoked with unbelievers: what part hath he that believeth with an Infidel?" He grows quite fierce on the subject (Gal. i.)—"If an angel from heaven preach any other gospel, let him be accursed," which, I presume, means something disagreeable.

This condemnation of all unbelievers, this separation of men into believing and unbelieving, and this cursing of all teachers contrary or opposed to Christ, lie at the root of that terrible movement which was carried on for centuries by fire, sword, and chains, till the sceptical spirit arose which shamed the Christian world, and bid it hold its murderous hand. The practice of the Christian world for ages may be read in the awful language of Moses (Deut. xxxii.). Substitute the Christian Church for the word God in those verses, and you have a picture of its mode of dealing with the unbelievers.

It has been urged that this spirit of persecution could not come from God, because he is a God of love, and that all the cruelty perpetrated in his name is to be attributed to the wickedness of God's servants, that it is antagonistic to his holy nature. In order to test this, let us inquire into God's character, as given in his own book. Only a few examples can be given, and I do not say that these are true, but we read that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God." The 2 Thess. ii. 11, speaking of those who receive not the love of truth that they might be saved, says, "For this cause, God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned." Other persons, the same writer continues, have been chosen from the beginning to salvation.

Another instance may be found in 1 Kings xxii. 22, wherein the Lord accepts the services of a spirit who offers to deceive Ahab, by being a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets—"Now, therefore, behold, the Lord had put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets." Again, "If the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived that prophet, and will stretch out my hand upon him and will destroy him," &c. (Ezek. xiv. 9.)

On one occasion the people complained of having no bread and no water, "And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, and much people of Israel died." (Numb. xxi. 6.) On another occasion it is related that "the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven, and he overthrew those cities and all the inhabitants, and that which grew upon the ground." (Gen. xix. 24.)

Some persons do not believe the Lord would do anything wrong, but Amos ch. iii. says, "Shall there be evil in a city and the Lord hath not done it?" Again, in Micah i. 12, "For the inhabitant of Maroth waited carefully for good, but evil came down from the Lord upon the gate of Jerusalem." The following is very clear: "I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil. *I the Lord do all these things.*" (Is. xlv.).

It would be impossible in the space allotted for this essay to even name the battles the Lord is said to have arranged, to say nothing of the number killed and wounded, and the cities made desolate; but one transaction in which he was concerned is too important to be passed over. In Gen. vi. the Lord is described as planning the wholesale destruction of all the inhabitants of the earth. We are here told in the most exact language that "every living substance was destroyed." "Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark," and this was done by the Christian's God. The author of Christianity is here described as planning and superintending a scheme of the most cruel and revolting character that the world has recorded—supplying all the gigantic machinery for effecting this terrible slaughter of all the creatures he had been at the trouble to make. What makes the case still worse and more awfully tragic, is the fact that the same God continued the existence of the same kind of creatures which he knew would necessitate the cruel death of his only son. An impartial student of these statements will be able to form an estimate of the character of the God of the Bible.

A person who makes others in the image of himself to be destroyed, or that he may destroy them himself, is one to whom the attribute love is misapplied. Yet in books and sermons, and even on the walls of our great cities, we read the extraordinary sentence, "God is love!" It is the love of a father who destroys his own children. The less love people have of this kind, the better for mankind. Yet this same God is the author of Christianity—the Christian ideal of perfect love, mercy, and justice. Millions say they love this God; can this be possible?

The story of Christianity, according to the Bible, begins in the Garden of Eden. A man and woman, the father and mother of us all, are placed in a Garden, surrounded by circumstances which are certain sooner or later to bring about the fall of man. The penalty attached to the act of disobedience is death; and if this plan had been carried out, *there would have been no sinners, no Christianity, no Saviour, and no salvation—in fact, no human race*, according to this tale.

The fall of man is the cause of Christianity, and Christianity requires the fall of man to justify its existence. One necessitates the other. That both were portions of God's plan is obvious, for "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." (Acts xv.)

No talk about free-will or the wickedness of the devil will set aside the important fact that all that which men glory in calling Christianity, owes its origin to the transgressions of Adam and his wife. Now, if we admit a devil in the Garden, and a free-will in Adam, and grant that no Gospel and no Christ were possible without these, the fact still remains that *only one source of power exists* to whom we can refer to the origin of the devil and the free-will, for by God "were all things created that are in heaven and earth, *visible and invisible*." (Col. i.)

There is no escape from the conclusion, that whatever happened in the Garden, or in man, was in accordance with the will and plan of God, who is the maker and ruler of all things. To admit any other power, would be to limit the power of the Almighty, or to recognise more Gods than one.

An unbiassed reader of the third chapter of Genesis would infer that before the fall, no labour except that of tending the Garden of Eden was contemplated. After the fall, Adam is discharged from his situation and is sent forth, or, as we should now put it, is "condemned to hard labour for life" among thorns and thistles. Now is it not a fact, that the whole of our modern civilisation is the result of the

combined labour of the human race? Every ship that floats, every train that runs, every thing in our houses or on our bodies, every comfort we possess, every science, and every printed word we read, attest the value of human labour! Yet in spite of all these world-wide facts, this book speaks of labour as the punishment for some fabled sin against some imaginary God who once dwelt in some corner of the earth, when its inhabitants consisted of himself, his gardener, and the gardener's wife! This is indeed a tale for children in understanding. Yet the Christian often boasts that civilisation, which is the result of continuous labour, is owing to his faith and his book.

Admitting that some calamity involving the eternal interests of mankind did happen, in the place and manner described by the Bible, it must have been by the will of God, in spite of the will of God, or without God's will interfering: whichever it was, either his goodness, his power, or his love for mankind, must be disbelieved after this.

But what did he do to repair the injury? He destroyed every living substance, "except those in the ark." Next, he sent his only son to be put to death, so that "by his blood we shall be saved from wrath" (Rom. v.) What wrath? Whose wrath? God is love!

The death of Christ is in harmony with the character of God, as before described. Judas betrays him so that he may be put to death (Mark xiv.), and he submits to this frightful death by the will of God—yet in the same chapter (v. 21) he himself says it had been good for Judas if he had never been born. Never been born! If he had not been born, had not been a devil, Christ would not have been betrayed and died, and nobody would have been saved! Without a Judas the scheme could not have been carried out. But John's words (c. vi.) settle this point: "For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him."

Here, then, we have God the father planning the death of his only son by means specially adapted to secure his destruction. If a *man* had done this, we should use very strong language against him and his plan. If God, the all-powerful, could not have "saved" mankind without sacrificing Jesus, he could have prevented their being "lost" if he liked.

What a strange story is this. A good God puts to death an innocent God to deliver wicked people from the wrath of a God of love. If God the creator had put to death the

first sinner, Adam, there would have been no wicked ; or, failing in that, if he had prevented the building of the ark, all the wicked might have been drowned. God's ways are not as our ways. So much the better for us.

To rectify the evil doings of mankind, God did not send a race of Christs with absolute power over sin and temptation, but only one innocent Christ to suffer for the guilty sinners—and still the sinners go on sinning, just as though he had not come. What would the civilised world say if we proposed to hang one innocent man to save all the murderers?

What would virtuous men and women say if all the governments in the world combined and put one innocent person to death in order to release all the offenders against the laws and morality of the whole world? The unsophisticated moral sense of the world would be shocked at such a proposal. Rather let *all* men suffer for their own wrongs, and all the criminals be hanged, than *one innocent* person be put to death. How long will mankind profess to follow so unreasonable a creed? This may be divine, but it is inhuman, cruel, a scheme of blood.

What a strange story ! The Son dies to appease the wrath of God the Father ; the Son being equally God and equally wrathful, why not the Holy Ghost die to reconcile him? And, lastly, the third person being equally God, and equally wrathful, why not the first person die to reconcile him? In the end all would be crucified. The illustrious pagan could not believe in an expiring crucified infinite God. Surely no man in his senses does believe in such an unreasonable story as this. Men only believe they believe.

On the bright side of this story it is not necessary for me to dwell. Jesus, as a patriot, exposing the priests, and dying at the hands of an ignorant and bigoted misguided multitude, is not the theological Jesus who has done all the mischief I deplore. It is not against a reformer of abuses and a benevolent advocate of human rights, that any Freethinker has one word to say. So soon as the Gospel is made to mean the intellectual and social elevation of man, it will cease to be all that it is and has been. Happily for society, the desire for intellectual and social progress is growing stronger than the belief in the Gospel.

To return. This scheme being carried out, Christ having died to save the world, is the world saved? Certainly not. After all this agony and bloody sweat, another element is introduced men must *believe*, and these signs shall follow



them that believe (Mark xvi.)—they shall cast out devils, they shall take up serpents, “and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them, they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.”

Now, if only those are believers who can do all these wonderful things, how many are there alive at the present time? Is it true that any of the Christians of to-day can take poison, play with serpents, and cure the sick, better than the Freethinker? To show these signs, a person must have a different skin and stomach to what man has, or every time a dose of poison is swallowed, God must work a miracle to prevent it operating. Any sane man would hesitate before risking his life to show such signs as these, even to convert an unbeliever. He would argue in favour of the doctrine rather than attempt his conversion by example. Only a few fanatics exist in the whole world who rely on miracle for the cure of diseases. Mankind in general, including so-called Christians, rely on science and the men who have studied the curative art, for relief in cases of physical and mental suffering. Then where are the Christians—“them that believe?”

We know it is written (James v.), “And the prayer of faith shall save the sick ;” but if so, why do Christians subscribe to the “medicine men,” to hospitals, and infirmaries? Is it because they do not believe? Surely their method would be less painful to the patient and less costly to society!

If nearly the whole of Christendom not only ignore their own method, but adopt the Secular scientific method, where are the Christians—“them that believe?” The doctrine is impracticable, that’s the answer. There are but few real believers, but many sincere persons believe that they believe.

Test this matter another way. If there were any believers alive, the following words would have a public importance that no unbeliever could ignore and no doubter dispute, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth in me, the works that I do he shall do also—and greater works than these shall he do.” (John xiv.)

Take the cream of the Christian party—all the bishops and ministers of the Gospel on the face of the earth—can they, combined, even feed another five thousand, or fast forty days, or raise the dead, or walk on the sea, or see all the world off Snowdon? Without asking them to do “greater works than these,” if they cannot do even these, where are the Christians—“them that believe?”

To get rid of these difficulties, the followers of Jesus, who are clever, contend that these extraordinary powers ceased with the early Christians ; but I tell them that signs of belief are more needed now than ever, and further, that I believe they are to-day just as able to show these signs as the early Christians, and not more so. Where people are ignorant even to-day, Christians do not lack pretensions to being superior to other people in doing impossible things.

A great deal is urged by preachers and defenders of Christianity in favour of its broad humanity, on the ground that it enjoins love even to enemies, and that you are to bless even those that curse you. Those who have read history know what Christians did to their enemies and opponents. They destroyed them. But what does the Master himself say ? " Whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea." (Mark ix.)

Again, " Whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my father, which is in heaven." (Matt. x.)

The same sentiment is repeated in another place (Mark viii.), and another writer (2 Tim. ii.) says emphatically, " If we deny him, he also will deny us."

Again (John xii.)—" He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him, the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." Any one impressed with the notion that Christ is a forgiving and generous spirit should read what will take place at this "last day" (Matt. xxv.). Here all nations are gathered together, like boys at school, or regiments of soldiers, and are put to the "right" or the "left" amongst the "sheep" or the "goats." Now for the mercy and love to enemies—"Then shall he say unto them on the left-hand—Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire *prepared* for the devil and his angels." In other words (2 Thess. i.)—"The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that *know not God*, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe."

It is playing fast and loose with language, to preach the love of Christ in the face of such cruel and revengeful de-

clarations as these, which could proceed only from the mouth of a despot or a savage.

By way of reply to this, it may be urged that this awful doom may be avoided, but not unless you believe. All the "fearful and unbelieving" are to go into the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone (Rev. xxi.), where their worm dieth not, and the fire is never quenched.

Instead of being so easy for mankind to escape, there is the greatest difficulty, and the whole of the preaching which declares that heaven is open to everybody, and hell only open to those who seek it, is as nearly as possible the reverse of the truth.

"Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction. Strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and *few there be that find it.*" (Matt. vii.) Was the road made narrow purposely?

As regards the narrow road and the strait gate, we are distinctly told that "many will seek to enter in and shall not be able" (Luke xiii.) And this could not be otherwise, since "many are called, but few chosen" (Matt. xxii.) In the day when the Son of Man is revealed, we read that "in that night there shall be two men in one bed, the one shall be taken and the other shall be left" (Luke xvii.) One class of men are certain to be shut out, "for it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Luke xviii.) The only hope for the bishops and the rich supporters of the Church is to give away all their wealth to their rich relations before they start on their celestial journey. There is another class that will hardly get into heaven—"them that are without;" to them "all these things are done in parables, that seeing they may see and not perceive, hearing, they may hear and not understand, lest at any time they should be converted" (Mark iv.)

The idea that Jesus came into the world to open up a broad road for everyone to walk to glory in is but an idea, not a fact, since he was not sent save to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. xv.) And the Lord "made the wicked for the day of evil" (Prov. xvi.) So they have no chance whatever, and never had any. And St. Paul (Rom. ix.) defended this as being in harmony with God's character!

Even the conditions of discipleship would deter many from following Jesus, since their love of humanity is higher than their love of a sect or a leader, and such could not comply with—"If any man come unto me, and hate not

his father, mother, wife, children, brethren, sisters, &c., he cannot be my disciple" (Luke xiv.) It has been urged that this text is not the pure word of God, that it means something different ; all objectionable texts ought to mean something different to what they say. For instance, how absurd to suppose that a follower of Christ should "hate his brother," when we know in that case he would be a "murderer," and "no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him" (1 John iii.)

Those who believe the mission of Jesus to be peace, love, harmony, and goodwill, either do not believe the word of God, or require great latitude in interpreting the following remarkable words : "I am come to send fire on the earth" (Luke xii.) ; "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth ? I tell you nay, but rather division" (Luke xii.) ; "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth ; I come not to send peace, but a sword. I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law" (Matt. x.)

So far as my observation and reading enable me to judge, this is the only part of the Gospel of glad tidings and great joy which has been successfully taught, and the only part that has been universally adopted in practice.

I believe the amount of family discord, persecution, and war, caused by professing religionists, to be almost as great as has been produced by all other causes put together.

Books have been published to show that Christianity means pure Democracy, Republicanism, universal liberty, and all sorts of good things. To judge of these representations we must appeal to the Book, and truth compels us to state that there are no such declarations to be found in it. St. Paul says (Romans xiii.) the powers that be are ordained of God, and if you resist them you will be damned. The great patriots that have resisted the powers that be—the hope of the world and friends of man—are thus all damned.

In Luke xix. we read : "A certain nobleman went to receive a kingdom, but the citizens hated him, and said—We will not have this man to reign over us." It concludes, "But those mine enemies that would not that I should reign over them, bring them hither and slay them before me."

These two statements, if they apply to the question at all, or have any meaning, would appear to teach government by divine right against the will of the people. If they illustrate the politics of Jesus, let us be thankful for

his assurance—"My kingdom is not of *this* world." (John xviii.) Submission to governments by divine appointment received a severe check when the English cut the king's head off, and when the French stirred the world by their mighty revolution.

But the Gospel teaches men not to resist evil—if our coat is taken, to hand over our cloak; and if our goods are taken away, not even to ask for them back again! (Matt. v.; Luke vi.)

Mr. Mill has well said these are texts to pelt adversaries with, but Christians are not remarkable for anything besides repeating these texts on Sundays and on special occasions.

Even a Christian does not practise the philosophy of letting others take from him what he wants and has worked for himself. The most extreme social theory never proposes that another shall take the loaf from my mouth to fill his own. To do this would be to encourage all sorts of insult and robbery. The Christians are not such lunatics as to put these doctrines in practice, but "he that believeth not shall be damned."

The Gospel is a message to the poor, we are told, and a very poor message it is. The poor ye have always with you; they shall never cease out of the land. "Blessed be ye poor;" "Blessed are ye that hunger now" (Luke vi.)

There is a strange contrast between being blessed and being poor. The one means being in tranquil possession of good things: the other means wanting proper food, shelter, comfort, and the means of living a long, pleasant, and healthy life. Absolute poverty is a state of Christian perfection, but very few of the bishops are perfect, or care to be, only those who sit on benches without velvet even approach perfection among the flock. But "If thou wilt be perfect, sell all thou hast, and give to the poor" (Matt. xix.; Luke xviii.; Mark x.) "He that believeth not shall be damned."

Suppose this carried out, if one county sells out and distributes to the poor, and each follows in succession till the whole nation becomes perfect, it must then sell to some foreign country, and distribute to some other country, and when we all become perfect we shall be without a dinner or a shilling. Very few Christians wish to become perfect, but "he that believeth not shall be damned."

Consistent with this view of poverty is, "Lay not up treasures on earth, take no thought for the morrow, for your life, or what you shall eat, drink, or wear" (Matt. v.)

Suppose all Europe were converted—ceased to be provident, industrious, and to prepare for the future—how long would society hold together? Next season the people of Europe would plant no seed; they would be imitating the lords, and bishops, and the lilies of the field, which neither toil nor spin. The result would be no harvest—no food. Hence famine and disease would carry them all to glory so soon as they became perfect Christians. The inhabitants of these countries would cease to exist, and their Christianity would recommend itself, by example, only to some nation desirous of committing suicide!

So soon as Christianity is put into practice, this sinful world will become the inheritance of the unbelievers. Of course I shall be told the Christians have more sense than to put into active service such directions as the Gospel gives—but “he that believeth not shall be damned.” To carry out these doctrines would necessitate constant miracle; but “the age of miracles is passed,” saith the wise Shakspeare. Science has banished the Deity in our day from all active or providential interference, and has become itself the only providence of man. No thoughtful, scientific man believes that such supernatural aid in this world is either possible or desirable. The hope of man now is in knowledge, industry, and the universal reign of justice.

Miracles reported to have happened are urged in favour of Christianity being true, but as other systems offer the same kind of evidence, this does not specially assist the Christian, and it is not obvious that any doctrine which is not true and reasonable without miracle, would be so with miracle. Moreover, Jesus himself shows the futility of miracles when he says (Luke xvi.) “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.” But did miracles ever happen? What is a miracle?

Let us look at one recorded miracle, that of the loaves and fishes, the most useful, if it could be wrought. According to Luke (ix.) an evening party or pic-nic was held away from the towns and cities, and the natural question arose about refreshment. About 5,000 men, besides women and children, formed the party. After inquiry, it was found that there were only five loaves and two fishes amongst them all. They sat down on the grass, and were waited on by the disciples, and were all *filled*, and twelve baskets of fragments remained after this.

Now at a moderate computation each of these fishes,

which one writer describes as "small fishes," must have weighed over 2,500lbs., and each of the loaves 1,000lbs., and the time required to hand it round in the manner described, at the rate of serving one every minute, would be over seven hours, long before which time had expired, the whole party had gone home, according to the Gospel, for the day began to wear away before they commenced. Before evening had come they were all sent away. (Matt xiv.)

It is highly improbable that "a lad" had such loaves and fishes "in a basket," and if not, Jesus must have enlarged the fishes to the magnitude described, or contracted the stomachs to fit the occasion. But this is not left doubtful, because after all had eaten, there were eleven basketsfull more than before the eating began.

It is unreasonable to suppose this event ever happened, and the impracticability of dividing these seven small substances into seven or eight thousand parts, of sufficient magnitude to fill an ordinary human stomach, is plain to any person who devotes five minutes to the consideration of the subject. To say it was "a miracle" is not to prove that such an event ever occurred.

Besides, the belief that such an event took place two thousand years ago, will not fill one empty stomach to-day, and if those who believe can do greater works, *why don't they?*

In a nation containing a million paupers and people dying of starvation in its greatest cities, such a power of feeding the empty no benevolent being in heaven or on earth could refuse to exercise. This is a miracle *in print*, but in a country with a national system of education, with the laws of nature understood by all, and in the presence of a free press, such a miracle could not be performed. Such is my opinion. If such a tale were told by the disciples of any other prophet, the Christians themselves would reject it as imposture. And, in my opinion, all the other miracles are like unto this, evident impossibilities—mere tales.

It is often urged that Christianity must be true because the early disciples and followers of Jesus had no *inducements* to take up the doctrine, that none of their *material interests* could be served by it. Let Jesus answer this powerful argument in his own words. Peter said, Lo, we have left all and followed thee, "*what shall we have?*" Jesus said, "Ye shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Again, "Verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, brethren, sisters, mother, wife, children, or lands for my sake and the Gospel's, but he shall receive.

an hundred-fold *now in this time*, houses, brethren, sisters, mothers, children, and lands, with persecutions, and in the world to come eternal life." (Matt. xix.; Mark x.)

These offers are so tempting, that I have often wondered why the whole of the Jews did not join the movement for that reason only. The reader will observe that the word "wives" does not occur in the "hundred-fold," but "persecutions" does. This, and the fact that they may have doubted the security, may be offered as a partial explanation.

The Gospel is preached as the charter of freedom to the oppressed sons of toil. St. Paul advises men to obey their masters "with fear and trembling" (Eph. vi.) If a man has labour to sell, what has he to fear if the master buys and pays for it? "Servants, obey your masters in all things" (Col. iii.) "Be content with such things as ye have," and says he himself is contented in any state (Phil. iv.) What sublime doctrine for nigger-drivers, but how about the nigger? To him this means perpetual bondage. No man ever raised himself by being contented, by obeying everybody, or by living in fear of and trembling at all above him! The religion of Christ is much beloved by women. The greatest apostle writes: "Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord; as the Church is subject to Christ, so let wives be to their husbands *in everything*." (Eph. v.)

Can anything be more degrading than the entire submission of one half the world to the other half? Because a human being happens to be a woman—a wife—is that any reason why she should sink her individuality? Surely the black people of America are in a nobler position than this. But women are getting wiser than the Gospel, and the serfdom of Paul is being superseded by women becoming citizens of a free state. This new fashion becomes a woman, and may it endure when the writings of Paul are forgotten.

The great struggle in modern Europe has been, and is, an endeavour to reverse all the texts quoted, to counteract the operation of them, to oppose them, and supersede them. Instead of all this, called Christianity, we have great efforts to drive slavery out of existence, to raise the labourer by co-operation, to institute governments by the people for the people, to encourage prudence and forethought, savings banks, sick societies, life insurance societies, sanitary improvements, improved dwellings, education, and all other conceivable means for the prevention of evil and the increase of human comfort.



Christianity is often defended by quoting sensible, moral texts borrowed from Secular or Pagan writers, incorporated in the New Testament, and opposite texts can be quoted in reply, as shown in this paper. Let Christians admit that Christianity in its theory is wrong, and that Pagan or Secular moral teaching is right, then my opposition ceases, not till then.

Apart from the doctrines which some pretend to believe, and no one attempts to practise, I reject the Jesus whose father was a god or an angel, who could fast forty days, see all the world off the top of one mountain, raise the dead for no practical purpose, leaving Socrates, Confucius, Plato, and Aristotle still under ground. I do not believe in the Jesus who could walk on the sea, and not teach others how to do it, feed many thousands on next to nothing, and not leave the secret how he did it, who could wither a fig-tree and get nothing off it, send into the sea innocent little pigs that belonged to somebody else, who could speak of a glorious time and not stay to realise it, keeping the word of promise to the ear, but breaking the heart full of expectation. I do not believe in the Jesus who came to save the world and left without saving it, leaving it as full of ignorance and crime as when he entered it, promising to come again and upset everything except himself and his own party. I do not believe in the Jesus who went out of the world as mysteriously as he came into it, leaving men gazing and watching for his second appearance before they tasted death. (Matthew xvi.) His divided, persecuting, inconsistent followers still wait. Let them wait. In the meantime, we advise men to look for something better—to throw away these childish superstitions, to work out their own redemption by intelligence and self-reliant effort—for there is nothing more injurious to mankind than this Christian deified error.

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